Game-Based Learning:
A Powerful Model for Educational Content

By Tony Tung

Educators often complain about competing against the Nintendo, Xbox, or PlayStation, when they should be embracing the powerful concepts behind what makes these games successful. Regardless of content, factors such as motivation, complex storylines, and deep interaction, amount to high levels of engagement, making game-based learning a perfect medium for educational content.

Games allow experiences—chances to try out scenarios in a safe environment free from teachers and peers—and allow us to create meaning from problem solving. Well-designed games can teach consequence and sometimes even values. The environment can open up our creative resources, integrating them with the absorption of educational material, all in a seamless engaging experience when designed properly. Academic subjects can be turned into an enjoyable experience, whether for momentary glory or longer immersive and rewarding experiences that require strategy, planning, and a sense of adventure. Mark Prensky, author of *Digital Game-Based Learning*, argues that current learning methods for young learners fail to engage learners used to

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interactive media. As our society evolves, so must our teaching methods. Despite the advanced techniques we have now, the focus on gaming in education is still relatively small.

James Gee, author of *What Video Games Have To Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, lays out, among his many principles, that a good learning game will ensure that the learner must be enticed to try, that the learner must be enticed to put in lots of effort, and that the learner must achieve some meaningful success. Surely these are ideas that can be incorporated into any content area.

Games for many are a philosophical departure from classroom and instructor-led models, but they can teach. They are not all created equal. Games are not meant to replace primary materials or teachers. But beneath what Raph Koster calls "the dressing" of a game, there are significant lessons to be learned and tacit knowledge that can be gained that only comes from tackling issues in a gaming environment, even if virtual. Motivating and reaching the current generation of young learners has changed dramatically—can educators answer the challenge?

Tony Tung, Senior Specialist, Creative Director, JUMP into Reading for Meaning program, may be contacted at tungt@prel.org.